

LR 337

Examine Farm to School Programs

Report to the Agriculture Committee Incorporating Draft Report and Recommendations of the LR 337 Task Force

Presented by Senator Tom Brandt

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LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION 337 Introduced by Senator Brandt, Legislative District 32

PURPOSE: It has been ten years since Legislative Resolution 42 (2009) first explored the statewide economic and educational potential of a "farm to school" program in Nebraska. In the intervening decade, notable progress has been made in instituting the methods and systems necessary to assist Nebraska producers in providing local schools with fresh and minimally processed foods for school meals and snacks. The addition of a local foods coordinator and introduction of "Nebraska Thursdays" and "Harvest of the Month" programs from the Department of Education have resulted in more school districts sourcing from local farmers and market gardeners. Interest has increased on the federal level as well, with the United States Department of Agriculture's Farm to School Grant Program receiving more requests than it has available funding, and additional federal legislation currently under consideration by Congress, the "Farm to School Act" and the "Kids Eat Local Act", both cosponsored by Rep. Jeff Fortenberry. A follow-up legislative interim study examining the status of Nebraska's farm to school activities and the needs of the stakeholders involved shall ensure that the necessary coordination and strategic planning is in place for further growth.

This interim study shall reexamine which Nebraska-grown food products can feasibly be used for school meals and snacks, including use of appropriate preservation methods of local foods by school nutrition staff for use later in the school year, and shall review existing regulations of the Department of Agriculture, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and other authorities that may impact the supply of Nebraska-grown foods provided to local schools. In addition, the study shall assemble a catalog of where farm to school activities are happening in the state, along with volume LR337 2020 LR337 2020 -1- and cost totals for foods locally sourced, to provide insight into best practices as well as barriers that are impeding participation.

To reflect the interests and needs of the various stakeholders concerned with creating successful statewide farm to school opportunities, this interim study shall include input from: (1) Producers of agricultural products marketed at Nebraska food markets, including producers of fruits and vegetables, agricultural protein products, and grains; (2) Suppliers of agricultural products, including grocers and school suppliers; (3) Meat processors; (4) Food distributors; (5) Food assistance agencies; (6) Resource conservation and development organizations; (7) Representatives of school food services from rural and urban public school districts; (8) Representatives from a summer food service program and from a child and adult care food program; (9) Tribal organizations; (10) An agricultural education extension organization; (11) A member-based agricultural marketing promotion and education program; (12) Representatives from the Department of Agriculture, State Department of Education, and Department of Health and Human Services; and (13) Any other interested parties or organizations.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA, SECOND SESSION: 1. That the Agriculture Committee of the Legislature shall be designated to conduct an interim study to carry out the purposes of this resolution. 2. That the committee shall upon the conclusion of its study make a report of its findings, together with its recommendations, to the Legislature.

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CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction.....	5
Procurement.....	7
Nebraska Programs That Promote Local Procurement	11
Limitations to Local Food Procurement	12
Perspectives	14
Education.....	17
Overview of current education offerings and findings	18
Limitations	22
Tribal Farm to School Component.....	23
Policy.....	24
Task Force Findings & Recommendations	24
Appendix.....	32
Addendum.....	35

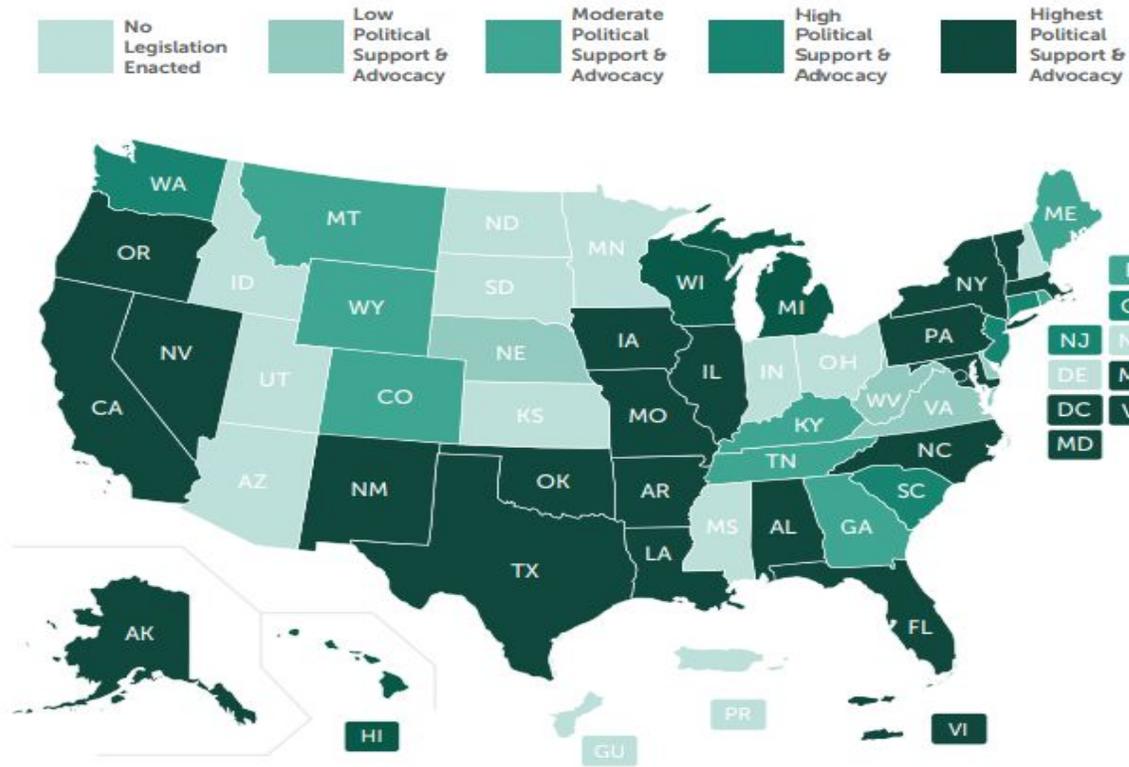
Introduction

In the eleven years since the Nebraska Legislature’s Agriculture Committee issued its first “Farm to School Task Force Report” (LR 42 in 2009), farm to school has grown from being an intriguing notion to being an active contributor in school classrooms, cafeterias and Nebraska communities.

From the outset, farm to school has been understood to be ‘good for kids’: offering children an opportunity to eat locally produced nutritious food, learn where their food comes from, and through school gardens and other hands-on activities, actually experience agriculture and growing food themselves.

In addition to its nutritional and educational benefits though, over the course of the past decade Nebraskans have begun to understand what a huge economic opportunity farm to school presents for school districts, local producers and communities. The USDA Child Nutrition Programs operate as the largest restaurant chain in the U.S.— constituting a massive local market for food growers everywhere in the country. Farm to school procurement is a business relationship between school nutrition administrators charged with feeding our children, and the local farmers and market gardeners who supply the food. Likewise, these same growers are contributing heavily through property taxes that build the budgets of our local school districts.

Map of State Farm to School Policies



The economic benefits of farm to school percolate all through our local communities. By providing a stable, reliable market for local produce, edible dry beans, grains, eggs, dairy, and meat, farm to school enables Nebraska communities to start recapturing a portion of the 90 percent of our food dollar that is currently leaving the state.¹ By keeping that money at home, our farmers and producers prosper. Our schools remain funded. Our businesses see additional wealth multiplying throughout the local economy. And our personal ‘Food IQ’ grows, as we learn where our food comes from and connect with the people who grow it.

Farm to school is both an economic and educational package that is just waiting to be maximized in school districts and communities all across Nebraska. But in addition to the immediate economic and educational dividends the program pays, farm to school also has the virtue of being a huge investment in our state’s future. Getting local food back into our schools—not only into our school cafeterias and early childhood kitchen facilities, but into our classroom curriculums—will enable us to start training a whole new generation of farmers and market gardeners. By expanding the program’s reach today, we can begin grooming the food growers and food workers of tomorrow who will ensure that Nebraska remains an ‘agricultural powerhouse’ for decades to come.

¹ Crossroads Resource Center, November 2010, pp. 9-10, <http://www.crcworks.org/crcdocs/nebsum10.pdf>

Food is the foundation of everything we do. Developing a resilient, local network of producers and suppliers increases our personal food security. As the COVID-19 pandemic has graphically demonstrated, our national and global food system is subject to distribution bottlenecks and breakdowns. Having our own localized food production and distribution capability greatly increases the likelihood that both we -- and our children -- will always have plenty to eat.

This report examines the three interconnected components essential to taking farm to school to the next level statewide, both economically and educationally. First, it examines the ongoing challenges surrounding 'Procurement' of local food for Child Nutrition Programs. Second, it looks at the multi-faceted role 'Education' performs from teaching and learning to public outreach and awareness. And finally, the report discusses the implications for 'Policy and Recommendations' and the steps schools, the private sector, and government at various levels can pursue to make farm to school a driver for prosperity throughout the entire state.

CORE ELEMENTS OF FARM to SCHOOL



PROCUREMENT²:

Introduction

Farm to school³ enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and other educational settings.

Background Information

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) oversees the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Special Milk Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP).

² references USDA Farm to School Census & NFSN Benefits sheet

³ Farm to school definition, farmtoschool.org

Nationally, the NSLP provides 30 million federally subsidized lunches and 15 million federally subsidized breakfasts to children each school day. FNS provides assistance for the NSLP and SBP in the form of cash reimbursements for each reimbursable meal, with rates for each program depending on the child’s eligibility for free or reduced-price meals. Federal assistance is intended to supplement state and local resources (including student payments) and help ensure children are provided nutritious school meals.⁴

Child Nutrition Program	Reimbursement Rates ⁵		
	Free	Reduced	Paid
School Breakfast Program & Child and Adult Care Centers	\$1.89	\$1.59	\$0.32
National School Lunch Program & Child and Adult Care Centers	\$3.51	\$3.11	\$0.33
Summer Food Service Program*	Breakfast: \$2.16 Lunch or Supper: \$3.76		

**A federally-funded program that reimburses sponsors who serve free meals to all children and teens in low-income areas during the summer months when school is not in session.*

Food and labor each make up about 45% of a school’s lunch budget, totaling 90% of the total lunch budget per meal. Food costs alone are about \$1.70 per meal.⁶ Of the total 350,000 students in Nebraska, average daily participation in school lunches is 230,574. In school year 2019, Nebraska served an estimated 41,500,000 school lunches and purchased more than \$70,550,000 of food.⁷

The 2008 Farm Bill directed the Secretary of Agriculture to encourage schools to purchase locally grown and raised products “to the maximum extent practicable and appropriate.” The Secretary was also instructed to allow schools to use a “geographic preference”⁸ when procuring locally grown and locally raised unprocessed agricultural products. Geographic preference is particularly useful in formal solicitations where respondents are ranked and scored.

⁴ USDA School Nutrition Operations & Meal Cost Study - Executive Summary, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS-Volume3.pdf>

⁵ Nebraska Department of Education Reimbursement Rates, <https://www.education.ne.gov/ns/reimbursement-rates/>

⁶ USDA School Nutrition Operations & Meal Cost Study, 2014-2015 school year, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS-Volume3.pdf>

⁷ NDE Nutrition Services, National School Lunch Program School Year 2018-2019 Statistics

⁸ USDA Geographic Preference Fact Sheet, http://www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/USDA_Geographic_Preference_fact_sheet.pdf

Though there are various paths a school can take to bring local foods into the cafeteria, federal rules prohibit schools from using “local” as a required product specification in solicitations. Options exist in the following pathways for including the desire for local foods in the procurement process.

1. Micropurchase⁹: Purchases valued under \$10,000 fall below the micropurchase threshold and can be purchased without obtaining multiple bids.
2. Informal Procurement: The federal and state small purchase threshold is \$150,000. Purchases for under that amount can be made with use of the informal procurement method. While three bids are required under this method, the buyer does not need to publicly advertise the purchase and can choose to make requests only from vendors supplying local products. If there are not three local vendors to request quotes from, schools can request products from both local and nonlocal sources and target local products by using product specifications, technical requirements or geographic preferences.
3. Formal Procurement: For purchases over \$150,000, the formal procurement method must be used. An invitation for bids (IFB) or requests for proposals (RFP) are publicly advertised. With use of an RFP, evaluation criteria related to local can be used, as well as a geographic preference.

Definitions of local vary widely depending on the unique geography and climate for where a school is located and on the abundance of local food producers and manufacturers. Many schools define local as within a certain number of miles from the school, within the county, or within the state. Defining local by product type or season is also a common method. Regardless of the definition, local is determined by the school. When using a geographic preference to source food for the federal school meal program, the school has full jurisdiction to determine that definition based on product, season or other considerations.

Additional oversight of farm to school efforts at the federal level happens within the USDA FNS Office of Community Food Systems (OCFS). This agency arm is charged with helping child nutrition program operators incorporate local foods in the NSLP (and its associated programs), SFSP, and CACFP; and works with Tribal communities to better incorporate traditional foods into FNS meal programs. OCFS accomplishes this through grant making, training and technical assistance, and research.

In 2010, Congress enacted Section 243 of the *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA)*, the most recent Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR), establishing the USDA Farm to School Grant program. These competitive grants are awarded on an annual basis to support farm to school programs nationwide with funds for training, supporting operations, planning, purchasing equipment, developing school gardens, developing partnerships and implementing farm to

⁹ USDA Fact Sheet: How Will You Bring Local Foods into the Cafeteria with Your Next Food Purchase?, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/DecisionTree.pdf>

school programs. Nebraska has been awarded a total of seven projects, totalling \$495,005 in USDA Farm to School grant funds¹⁰:

- 2014: \$99,600 awarded to Center for Rural Affairs for training and technical assistance to farmers and schools to network and increase purchases of local foods.
- 2016: \$42,300 awarded to Center for Rural Affairs to host a Four-State Farm to School Conference (NE, MO, KS, IA); and, \$45,000 awarded to Lincoln Public Schools to identify farmers and producers to provide local foods to school meal programs.
- 2017: \$71,860 awarded to Nebraska Department of Education to develop Nebraska Thursdays.
- 2019: \$98,450 awarded to Center for Rural Affairs to collaborate with Nebraska State Future Farmers of America (FFA) Association and Nebraska Extension to expand the Greenhouse to Cafeteria program.
- 2020: \$38,725 awarded to Burwell Public Schools to develop a farm to school action plan for the school district; and, \$99,070 awarded to Nebraska Department of Education to collaborate with Nebraska Extension to expand Extension's farm to school reach, and to develop a 2021 Nebraska Farm to School Institute.

Every five years, CNR provides Congress with an opportunity to improve and strengthen child nutrition programs. In June 2019, as part of Congress' attempt to revise CNR, federal lawmakers introduced two bills: The Farm to School Act of 2019, which would increase annual funding for the USDA Farm to School Grants from \$5 million to \$15 million;¹¹ and the Kids Eat Local Act, which would update school procurement rules to make it easier for schools to explicitly request foods that are locally grown, raised, or caught.¹² These bills are in a holding pattern; HHFKA expired on September 30, 2015 and no revision of CNR has yet been finalized. Fortunately, the programs mandated under HHFKA continue to operate.

Value in Prioritizing Local Procurement

The USDA Farm to School Program was formally established with HHFKA in 2010, and in 2013 USDA conducted the first nationwide Farm to School Census (the Census) in order to establish realistic goals with regard to increasing the availability of local foods in schools.¹³ The 2015 Census documented that 29% of Nebraska school districts participate in farm to school activities, compared to 42% of districts nationally. Nebraska lags behind the nation in incorporating local foods into the cafeteria and classroom.

The Census calculated \$789 million was spent nationally on local food in schools during the 2013-2014 school year. The cost of the NSLP in fiscal year 2019 was more than \$14.1 billion.¹⁴ Each dollar invested in farm to school stimulates an additional \$0.60-\$2.16 of local economic

¹⁰ USDA Grant Awards, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/grant-awards>

¹¹ Farm to School Act of 2019, http://www.farmtoschool.org/documents/F2SAct2019_FactSheet.pdf

¹² Kids Eat Local Act of 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/116th-congress/senate-bill/1817?s=1&r=43>

¹³ The Farm to School Census, <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/find-your-school-district/nebraska>

¹⁴ USDA ERS, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/charts/>

activity.¹⁵ Sales to institutions can establish long-term revenue streams for individual food producers, and provide new opportunities for market diversification.

Nebraskans face grave health and nutrition issues. 11.5% of Nebraska children ages 10-17 are obese, and 34.1% of adults are obese with 10.2% having diabetes.¹⁶ Nebraska's local food products are a source of fresh, nutrient-dense foods. Access to these foods can support educational outcomes for students and promotion of food and agriculture-based learning activities that enhance the quality of the educational experience. When local foods are integrated into the cafeteria and classroom, there is noted improvement in eating behaviors. These include choosing healthier options in the cafeteria, and consuming more fruits and vegetables through school meals and at home from less than one to at least 1.3 servings daily.¹⁷

PROCUREMENT SOURCES¹⁸

- Broadline Distributors
- Food hub/aggregator
- Local grocer or food cooperative
- Local meat, grain, or vegetable processors
- Federal programs like USDA Foods, Department of Defense Fresh (local producers must become USDA vendors)
- Donations of local meat (must be USDA processed and packaged) or produce
- Farmers markets
- Directly from farmers
- School Gardens¹⁹

NEBRASKA PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE LOCAL PROCUREMENT

¹⁵ Health Impact Assessment Farm to School & School Gardens Oregon HB 2800 Assessment, https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/HealthyEnvironments/TrackingAssessment/HealthImpactAssessment/Documents/3_HIA_Assessment_UpstreamPublicHealth_HB2800.pdf

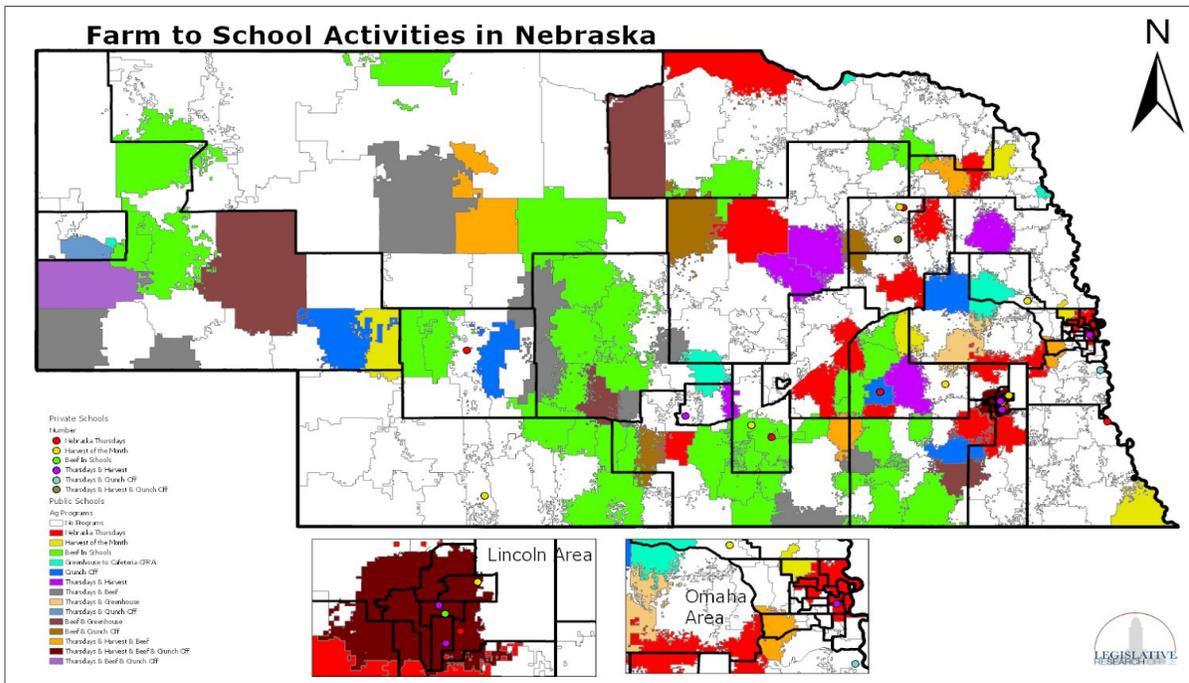
¹⁶ State of Childhood Obesity: Nebraska, <https://stateofchildhoodobesity.org/states/ne/#:~:text=In%20Nebraska%2C%2011.5%25%20of%20youth,and%20outcomes%20among%20high%20school>

¹⁷ The Benefits of Farm to School Fact Sheet, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/BenefitsFactSheet.pdf>

¹⁸ Nebraska Thursdays,

https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/NT_Thurs_Infographic_LetterSize.pdf

¹⁹ USDA Memo SP 06 - 2015, <https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/SP06-2015s.pdf>



* A larger version of this map is available in the appendix

Nebraska Thursdays²⁰

Nebraska Thursdays is a program created and managed by NDE that supports schools statewide in serving a Nebraska-sourced meal in school cafeterias on the first Thursday of each month. This program aims to promote farm to school, provide an accessible point of entry into local food sourcing, and support local businesses. Nebraska Thursdays participants receive access to a portal, restricted to Nebraska school nutrition directors and staff, highlighting seasonal and local recipes that are standardized to meet school meal patterns; and provides participants with several free and downloadable promotional materials. This program was developed with FY17 USDA Farm to School grant funds, in partnership with Center for Rural Affairs.

Harvest of the Month

Originally funded by a FY17 USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program award, NDE developed the Nebraska Harvest of the Month Program in partnership with Buy Fresh Buy Local-Nebraska. This statewide farm to school program features a different Nebraska specialty crop each month of the school year. The program promotes local sourcing of fruits and vegetables, and provides schools with resources to support sampling and serving local foods to students. Schools have the opportunity to expand Nebraska students' palates and increase student interest in healthy foods, nutrition and agriculture by participating.

²⁰ <https://www.education.ne.gov/ns/farm-to-school/nebraska-thursdays/>

Mountain Plains Crunch Off

Nebraska, under the leadership of USDA and NDE, participates in the multi-state CRUNCH OFF with Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The state with the most “CRUNCHES” per capita by biting into local, crunchy fruits and vegetables, wins the annual Crunch Off Competition. Students, teachers, farmers, parents, community members and local food enthusiasts celebrate farm to school month and the seasonally available produce offered in Nebraska. Additionally, the governor proclaimed October as Farm to School Month and Crunch Off month in 2020. Nebraska has won the competition in the Mountain Plains region in 2019 and 2020 with 4% of the population participating.

LIMITATIONS TO LOCAL FOOD PROCUREMENT

There are several practicality and regulatory issues that create obstacles for schools and early childcare facilities to purchase locally produced and processed foods. Understanding the rules and regulations surrounding the purchase of local foods can overwhelm food service directors and early childcare providers who are already taxed with menu planning, food preparation and service, and managing labor needs in childcare centers and school kitchens. Local cannot be used as a product specification in a school food solicitation. Schools must understand the options that exist for purchasing locally in order to meet regulations.

Due to limited knowledge and/or capacity for sourcing and purchasing these local products, it is understandable that schools often purchase food for school meals and snacks from regional and national intermediaries and distributors. These suppliers have established extensive supplier networks with food processors and in some cases directly with growers, that can pool purchases to command the most favorable prices, and that have warehousing, storage, transportation and perhaps processing capabilities to service accounts reliably. They have evolved to serve the unique needs of institutional buyers that purchase in large volumes, that prepare and serve hundreds of meals daily within defined budgets and average meal costs, and that are subject to certain regulatory standards regarding food sourcing. It is also attractive to schools and other institutional customers that such suppliers can often deliver foodstuffs in readily usable forms that minimize preparation and cooking times otherwise required by food service staff.

This same evolution is possible for farm to school if the following impediments are addressed.

- Establishing farm to school programs may require a substantial initial investment in storage and serving facilities, and sometimes equipment necessary for additional preparation of raw farm products.
- Locally sourced food products may represent a marginal increase in cost for some foods, like in-season produce, and a substantial cost difference in purchases of other products (i.e., value-added products, or animal products like beef, pork or chicken cuts).

- USDA Child Nutrition Programs utilize USDA Foods, considered “entitlement” foods; funds allocated for these entitlement foods don’t target local foods. During School Year 2019, USDA expected to purchase over \$1.2 billion in USDA Foods for child nutrition programs.²¹
- Locally sourced foods typically require additional labor to prepare. Schools often lack sufficient budget to hire additional staff for food preparation, and even if the budget exists, there is a lack of (skilled) workers.
- Managing relationships with local suppliers, including the process of comparing product specifications and prices, coordinating deliveries, and planning for use of local products at multiple sites in the district may entail substantial investment of administrative oversight. Additionally, schools lack relationships with local growers and aren’t sure how to identify producers in their region that are interested and willing to make sales to schools.
- Local producers lack time and vehicle capacity for delivery to multiple sites and of quantities required by larger districts.
- Producers lack existing working relationships with broadline distributors; requirements to sell through distributors can be a barrier for smaller and beginning farmers
- Distributors must reliably supply the local product ordered by schools, in order for schools to meet their plan for serving and promoting local; distributors must accurately label product supply, and be willing to list local products; there can be an extra layer of communication in order for schools to request local products, based on the school’s definition of “local”.
- Donations of local products can become a cultural norm. While there is value in donations of food products to schools, growing market diversity and economic impact to local growers are negatively impacted when products are donated from a variety of sources rather than purchased from local producers.
- Schools lack knowledge on establishing forward contracts with local suppliers; it can be a challenge for producers to break into the steady school market.
- There is a discrepancy between the scale of product needs for schools, compared to production on local farms. Also, seasonality of local produce doesn’t entirely align with the school year; and there is limited participation in Summer Food Service Programs across the state (compared to NSLP participation), a time when there is an abundant opportunity to grow fresh produce in the state.
- There is lack of understanding for producers regarding:
 - Crops to be produced that meet schools’ needs, and methods needed to grow for larger institutions rather than growing for markets like CSAs or farmers market sales. When do specific products desired by schools become cost effective for the grower? Developing business plans that make sales to schools profitable for local growers is an educational need.
- There is a lack of understanding for processors regarding:
 - Packaging needs and requirements, as well as desirable cuts of meat. How can processors meet the needs of schools?

²¹ USDA Foods in Schools / Child Nutrition USDA Foods Program, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/USDA-FIS-program-fact-sheet-4.13.20.pdf>

- Both producers and processors lack understanding on school requirements for farm and product insurance, farm food safety requirements, and any additional required or preferred certifications.
- There is a shortage of USDA-inspected meat processing facilities in the state due to the burden for processors to become federally inspected. Distance to deliver locally raised and processed meat from USDA-inspected processors is a limitation. Additionally, most small plants don't have refrigerated trailers for safe delivery of meat.
- Schools lack coordination for farm to school efforts, and lack a dedicated farm to school coordinator role in most Nebraska school districts.
- Lack of understanding by school staff and administrators on the value of farm to school activities in school districts.
- Lack of clarity on feasibility for centralized hubs or collective purchases that would increase buying power for multiple districts working together.

PERSPECTIVES: School Nutrition Directors and Farmers

Judy Poehlman, School Food Service Director, Wayne Public School, Wayne, NE

I started farm to school with the Nebraska Department of Education, wanting to keep an open mind. But I had many concerns. Would it require more of my time driving to pick up local items, compared to receiving the products that were already being delivered to the school by our distributor? I was concerned about food safety when using the fresh produce. Would costs be higher? And though we had purchased local melons regularly when in season, we never promoted the products as local.

Fast forward a few years, and we are actively purchasing and promoting local foods at Wayne Public School. The students and families like that I buy local or Nebraska products. Students are curious and want to know when we're using local produce and beef. I do wish I had more time to promote our Nebraska agriculture and products.

Using local beef has been an educational process for the kitchen and for the farmers, but it has been worthwhile. We work with Farm Bureau to source the beef locally, they get the beef to the locker, and I pick it up. I remember saying that I would never drive an hour to pick up local beef. Some of this beef is donated, but I want to purchase it if I can. I want this to be sustainable for the school and the farmer. I buy the produce, I want to buy the meat.

In the process I have learned that many students come from no agricultural background and a garden in the backyard is not common. Kids may not know what the tomato that makes spaghetti sauce looks like. I have come to look at farm to school as an opportunity to buy local, grow the local economy and help families who support our school.

Buying local is an opportunity to get fresher produce as the season allows. Using greens grown in the FFA tower gardens has allowed students to see their crops being used for lunch. It has started the spark of agricultural careers in Nebraska.

This school year we have purchased almost \$9000 of local beef, 245 watermelon, 180 cantaloupe, 76# tomatoes, cucumbers and green peppers. The reduction of self-serve fruit and vegetable bars (because of COVID-19) has impacted the amounts that we used this year. I believe the numbers would have been higher.

Edith Zumwalt, Director of Nutrition Services, Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln, NE

Lincoln Public Schools feeds over 26,000 students each school day for lunch. The District believes that all schools should be served alike. If we are going to use local foods, we need enough to be able to serve all the students that eat school lunch. We need local produce that is washed and cut. We no longer have the equipment or staff to process produce. We need insurance that the fresh produce is safe to serve. We have medically fragile students eating with us. Food cost is another important fact. We have about 55 cents to spend on fresh fruit and vegetables and 65 cents for entrees for the menu each day. Students prefer local produce because it has a better color and flavor. Students enjoy eating the Nebraska products we offer on Nebraska Thursdays because they know the food is from Nebraska.

Tammy Yarmon, Director of Nutrition Services, Omaha Public Schools, Omaha, NE

Omaha Public Schools' (OPS) Nutrition Services serves over 23,000 breakfasts and 40,000 lunches each day to PreK – 12th grade students.

Farm to school is a major initiative and priority for OPS Nutrition Services. Providing locally grown foods to students is a wonderful way to highlight Nebraska companies; who they are, where they are located, and the products they specialize in. OPS purchases impact the local economy, and help increase viability for Nebraska producers and food processors. Statewide, farm to school will support small companies impacted by loss of restaurant business due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2018-19, OPS spent over \$15,000,000 purchasing local products such as raw chicken drums and thighs, cucumbers, potatoes, squash, melons, corn, peppers, broccoli, and milk (from Nebraska cows).

High school student comments include how fresh and bright green the broccoli looks and the taste is much sweeter. The mini peppers are a favorite; brightly colored and just the right size. Elementary students enjoy the festivities, newsletters, games, and learning where the producer lives.

This is what farm to school is about: educating our students about where their food comes from and the benefits of purchasing from local companies.

National Farm to School Month is highlighted in October and local growers and producers are promoted to the community. Nebraska Thursdays became a permanent part of OPS menus in 2018. The menu on the first Thursday of each month features numerous local products. The day

is heavily promoted in schools with flyers, posters, newsletters, games, and of course, wearing Nebraska shirts.

When working with local producers, it is important to be flexible regarding distribution methods and the available products, quantity and variety. With 91 serving sites in OPS, the producer may not have the delivery mechanism to go to each of the sites or enough for every school. It is a partnership that must be creatively developed to make it beneficial for everyone.

What is happening in OPS's schools is tremendous. There are school gardens throughout the district and one school has a hydroponic garden and is raising fresh greens. Another school has installed a hoop house to extend the growing season and has wonderful teaching spaces for the students. The produce has been sold at farmers' markets, to parents at school meetings, and at the end of the school day when the children go home.

Each school year, our goal at OPS Nutrition Services is to continue to increase the dollars spent in Nebraska for local products. At the top of the list is to purchase local ground beef and develop a recipe specific to this product. Second on the list is adding buffalo to the menu on Nebraska's birthday.

Ryan Pekarek, Pekarek's Produce, Dwight, NE

I have 5 kids. Three are in school already – grades 4th, 5th and 7th. They participate in the school meals program. Our oldest had a box of Trix cereal from the school breakfast program. While I am sure there is a stamp on the package describing how healthy the cereal is, or how much fiber it contains, we can do better than this for our kids.

Pekarek's Produce has been delivering fresh produce to several school districts in eastern Nebraska for several years. This began with our local district of East Butler. The head of the lunch program was hesitant to begin, but eventually we began serving the district. Over time we began to search out larger districts – Omaha Public Schools, Lincoln Public Schools, Gretna Public Schools, Grand Island Public Schools. These districts are some of the largest consumers of fresh produce in the state.

Our typical season for delivering to schools begins in late August. Crops include melons, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, broccoli, potatoes, and winter squashes. The simplest crops to provide to schools are those that can be easily added to meals and salad bars. The fall months are a time when some of our usual marketing channels begin to slow. Farmers market sales typically drop after Labor Day. Schools are just ramping up. It gives us a new market opportunity in the fall when crops are still at full production. School lunch programs that are good candidates for a farmer to work with are those that are headed by "believers". If the head of the food service program believes that a good partnership can be had with a local farmer, the program will work. Small obstacles about insurance or delivery timing are easily overcome when both sides believe they can work together to get good food to the students.

One obstacle we have dealt with is the quantity a district can use. We have tried to get with a couple new districts in northeast Nebraska, but the quantities of the products that the schools

wanted did not justify the time of the driver and truck, let alone the cost of the products. It's probable that another grower closer to this area of the state can serve these districts better. Our drive to get into the larger districts in the eastern part of the state is largely economic. When we put the truck on the road, we need to have a large load to justify all of the cost of delivering. Our prices are typically competitive with the prices charged by the regular suppliers to the school districts (i.e., Loffredo's, CashWa, Reinhart). Our usual routes run through Lincoln and Omaha, so it is very simple to add another stop with a couple more pallets of food for the students. When both sides believe that a good business can be developed getting Nebraska fresh farm products into schools, a great opportunity is available.

Gary Fehr, Green School Farms, Lincoln, NE

I own and operate Green School Farms, a small specialty crop farm in northern Lancaster County, growing sustainably raised vegetables and herbs. Farm to school is embedded in my mission for how I want to serve the local food community. One of the best ways to give our kids a fighting chance to grow into healthy adults is through a return to school diets focused on fresh, whole foods. Education does not only occur in the classroom, it also occurs in lifestyle practices that kids are exposed to, as simple yet important as what a nutritious lunch looks like.

The reason I got involved in farm to school is because I believe if we teach kids from the start what proper nutrition is, and how they can eat to achieve that, then we are instilling lifelong habits of health. This translates very directly into other societal benefits such as lower healthcare costs, vibrant local economies, and an improved understanding of what true community health is.

But this means we need structures in place to increase interaction between local farms and schools. My own efforts to create individual relationships with several area schools have been fulfilling, but they are a drop in the bucket compared to what needs to occur statewide. We need local distribution networks to match up supply and demand of local foods, incentivizing both farms and schools to participate.

EDUCATION:

Introduction

Nebraska is unquestionably an agricultural state, with 92% of the state's land area dedicated to farming and ranching, and \$21 billion generated to the state's economy in 2018.²² And yet, our state does not provide comprehensive agricultural education to Nebraska students. Several successful programs have been implemented in our state to educate students on food and farming, but there are currently no statewide educational offerings ensuring that Nebraska youth have at least a basic understanding of where their food comes from and potential career opportunities in agriculture. As our state's farm population continues to age, educating future

²² Nebraska Agriculture Fact Card, <https://nda.nebraska.gov/facts.pdf>

generations of farmers is critical for Nebraska's long-term economic growth, food security, and agricultural traditions.

There are well-known, documented benefits to agricultural education both inside and outside the classroom.²³ Research has shown that students who receive in-classroom and/or hands-on education on the basics of food and farming derive many benefits in their academic achievement, social and emotional development, and attitudes and behaviors towards healthy eating. Specific findings include:

- Increased knowledge of STEM concepts for students participating in farm to school education
- An overall increase in academic achievement, regardless of subject, for farm to school students
- Increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables both at school and at home
- Increased willingness to try new food items and reduce phobia of new, unfamiliar foods
- Increased physical activity owing to the physical nature of gardening
- Reduced risk of overweight and obesity from both healthier eating habits and increased physical activity

There is also evidence that these benefits extend beyond the individual student to siblings, parents and other caretakers in the home. For example, research into the impacts of farm to school education programs outside of the school context has shown an increased level of food security for parents and other family members and an increase in students participating in meals served at home.

Overview of current education offerings and findings

Across Nebraska, several options exist for students to learn and engage with agriculture, from in-class instruction to hands-on learning opportunities in school gardens and greenhouses. These options are a patchwork of resources created and delivered by various agencies, nonprofit organizations and school districts, all recognizing the value of agricultural education for students.²⁴ Before discussing limitations and recommendations, this section will highlight known food, farming and agricultural education offerings in Nebraska.

NDE CTE Ag, Food and Natural Resources

The Nebraska Department of Education oversees the Career and Technical Education (CTE) component of K-12 education, providing students opportunities for specialized learning in six career fields. Agriculture is one of the six career fields that students can choose from to explore, but it is not required. Rule 10 in Nebraska prohibits NDE from mandating specific curriculum,

²³ The Benefits of Farm to School Fact Sheet, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/BenefitsFactSheet.pdf>

²⁴ NDE 2020-2021 CTE Course Standards and Programs of Study, https://cestandards.education.ne.gov/Program_FileLink_Multi.aspx?Sub=Aq&Pg=Aq

instead leaving each district to decide the curriculum they will use to meet state standards.²⁵ This allows districts to build student opportunities that align with business and industry strengths in their region of the state.

Each CTE career field consists of three components: classroom learning; work based learning; and leadership. In the Ag, Food and Natural Resources career field, the work based learning is known as Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE), and the leadership component is typically accomplished through the FFA program.

CTE is primarily funded by the Federal Perkins Career and Technical Education Act passed in 2006, which awards dollars to states based on population and average income.²⁶ Nebraska is the only state in the country that doesn't provide state-level funding for CTE. Other states provide matching funds to augment the federal Perkins funding. Most Perkins funds are passed-through to local school districts to implement their CTE program. All school districts complete a needs assessment and develop a four-year plan for CTE before being eligible for Perkins funds.

Total Number of students during the 2019-2020 academic year taking at least one Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources (AFNR) course.	14,076
Total Number of AFNR programs offered in 2019-2020 by Economic Development region:	526
Central Region	84
Grand Island MSA Region	39
Lincoln MSA Region	8
Mid-Plains Region	55
Northeast Region	141
Omaha Consortium Region	19
Panhandle Region	53
Sandhills Region	60
Southeast Region	67

²⁵ Nebraska Department of Education Rule 10, https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CLEANRULE10_2015LD.pdf

²⁶ Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/sectech/leg/perkins/index.html>

Nebraska Ag in the Classroom (AITC)

Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) is a statewide program that helps K-12 students and teachers develop an awareness and understanding that agriculture is their source of life's necessities. AITC has a long history of creating resources tied to state education content to assist teachers in connecting their students to their source of food, fiber, and fuel.

AITC is managed by the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation. Each year, AITC reaches 25,000 students, 600 teachers and 3,500 volunteers. AITC offers materials to encourage active learning with hands-on activities for youth; creates instructional materials aligned to Nebraska State Standards; and equips teachers with free programs and resources to bring agriculture alive in the classroom.

Greenhouse to Cafeteria - Center for Rural Affairs

Center for Rural Affairs operates the Greenhouse to Cafeteria program, providing training and technical assistance to school districts across the state. The Center aims to revamp school greenhouses for innovative food production by offering direct assistance to select schools while also creating statewide programs to assist all schools. In collaboration with Nebraska FFA, the Center selected ten rural schools to receive mini-grants and technical assistance to expand greenhouse programs. These schools are currently receiving assistance and will be working with staff throughout 2021. In addition, the Center staff are working with Nebraska FFA to build a Greenhouse to Cafeteria awards program to be offered to all state schools. This program will present an annual award to school greenhouse programs excelling in food production.

In addition, the Center is looking to inspire collaboration amongst instructors. Staff are working with UNL Extension to introduce a greenhouse peer network in the state. All state educators will have the ability to ask questions as well as share successes and challenges while building relationships with peers across the state. Center for Rural Affairs is striving to create a core farm to school program in Greenhouse to Cafeteria which will bring food production education into schools across the state.

Nebraska 4-H

Nebraska 4-H is a Nebraska Extension-led youth leadership and skill-development program that serves more than 140,000 students here in Nebraska. Most 4-H clubs operate outside of the school community, but there are many 4-H activities in afterschool programs. The primary focus of 4-H is in youth leadership development, with several ag-related topics used as opportunities to teach youth about food, farming and animal husbandry.

FFA²⁷

²⁷ FFA curriculum resources:
<https://cestandards.education.ne.gov/Courses/011000%20-%20Intro%20to%20AFNR.pdf>,
https://cestandards.education.ne.gov/Program_FileLink_Multi.aspx?Sub=Ag&Pg=Ag

The Future Farmers of America (FFA) is an ag-based education program that serves 9,000 students in 189 chapters across Nebraska.²⁸ Nebraska FFA members are enrolled in agricultural education courses, conduct a Supervised Agricultural Experience Program and can participate in a variety of FFA competitions and activities. As a NDE-led program, FFA is unique in that standards-based curricula are used in this program, fulfilling several STEM learning requirements.

Beef in Schools²⁹

One of the main objectives of the Nebraska Beef in Schools program is to provide an enhanced connection to agriculture and beef production for all ages of students. One way this is facilitated is through the direct implementation of educational materials into participating school classrooms. To enhance this opportunity, the Nebraska Beef Council, in collaboration with the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation, distributes age-specific resources for classroom education specifically designed to meet certain state standards of learning across multiple subject areas. In doing so, the materials are utilizing agriculture and beef production as a lens to teach math, social science, language arts, geography and reading comprehension. Placed holistically within the context of the program, these educational materials provide students with an experiential learning opportunity to see how the beef community works together across all aspects of the beef supply chain to get beef from pasture to the plate from the vantage point of their local community and resources.

Methodology and Evaluation Research Core studies

A 2018 study of school garden use in Nebraska conducted by the University of Nebraska, Lincoln Methodology and Evaluation Research Core³⁰ (MERC) provides many interesting insights into how school gardens are being used and what limitations educators face. The survey was completed by representatives from 361 schools across the state, spanning urban and rural areas, public and private schools and different roles within the school.

The responses indicated that more than 60% of schools have had or currently have a school garden or other growing space. Nearly half of those schools that have never had a garden said that the lack of care for the garden in summer months and lacking financial support were the main reasons preventing them from trying a garden. 88% of respondents in rural areas had a garden, compared to two thirds of urban schools.

Other findings from this study indicated that educators are mostly reliant on self-created lesson plans or online resources, and more than half of respondents (57%) reported that educators received no garden-based professional development in the last three years. Pre-K and early elementary students were the least likely to have access to a garden or other growing space at their school.

²⁸ List of FFA chapters:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/e/2PACX-1vSnfHgy55IQCVYyhkK64YpVI2K5RSlaUTJ56oA1kZQnqZ5ntiZv83l5HpA56Oip6zk3-7AwpC1tXdHM/pubhtml/sheet?headers=false&gid=0>

²⁹ Nebraska Beef in Schools,

<https://nebraskacattlemen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/beefinschoolsflyernew.pdf>

³⁰ Farm to School Nebraska Resources, <https://www.education.ne.gov/ns/farm-to-school/resources/>

Some factors that were seen as important in supporting the school garden, according to survey respondents, included encouragement from administrators, teacher training in garden-based learning and gardening skills, lesson planning time and access to standards-aligned curricula.

Respondents described several positive outcomes from their experiences working with students in school gardens, including increased leadership skills, increased sense of volunteerism, increased social skills and behaviors, and improved attitudes towards school in general.

Limitations

This task force brought together experts from across Nebraska to provide input into the limitations that exist to implementation of a robust farm to school education program. Representatives from nonprofits, the Department of Education, ag commodity groups and producers were convened to give input and share their thoughts and insights. We also sought input from various other experts in this area before drafting this report. Task force members identified several limitations related to education and farm to school, highlighting areas for improvement and opportunities for new initiatives.

The first set of limitations identified by the task force deals with the lack of readily accessible curricula for educators to utilize. Task force members spoke of a patchwork of existing curricula, mostly from outside Nebraska, that is available from various sources, but little in the way of easy to access and integrate into the school day. As discussed above, educators utilizing school gardens have reported that lacking easy-to-use curricula and lesson plans impedes their efforts.

Another limitation identified by this subgroup of the task force relates to a general lack of farming or gardening experience among educators. One of the primary approaches to farm to school education is to provide hands-on learning through a school garden. Starting and maintaining a school garden is a considerable amount of work, requiring commitments from administrators, teachers and other staff to ensure success. Typically, a passionate teacher, parent or student will kickstart a school garden project. When there is turnover in staff, or a student moves on, the school garden becomes a challenge to maintain. Ensuring longevity of these projects is essential, and equipping educators with some basic skills in this area is an important first step.

Another set of limitations relate to struggles to get buy-in from important stakeholders. For example, task force members talked about challenges to get administrators and school boards to see the value of farm to school programming. In the absence of strong support from leaders of schools and school districts, establishing farm to school programs will always be an uphill battle. Resources, funding, staff time and other needs can be hard to marshal without leadership support.

Finally, Nebraska's specialty crop industry is in its early stages of development and does not currently have any commodity-like presence in terms of marketing, lobbying or political

representation. This makes it difficult for the nascent industry to easily provide resources and expertise to educational and school garden endeavors.

Tribal Farm to School Component

Tribal Nations in Nebraska

There are four land-based Tribal Nations in Nebraska and they include: Umonhon Nation (Omaha Tribe); Isanti Nation (Santee Tribe); Ho Chunk Nation (Winnebago Tribe); and Usni Ponca Nation (Ponca Tribe).

Nebraska Tribal Food Sustainability

Farming and land management are long-time traditions in Nebraska Tribal communities and are key assets affecting Tribal communities' economic health and the health of their community members. Today, Nebraska Tribal communities are building sustainable food systems that improve health and nutrition, strengthen food security, create food-related businesses and, overall, increase control over Tribal agriculture and food systems. They are committed to promoting food sovereignty, including farm to-school programs.

Tribal Farm to School Programs

Tribal farm to school programs are similar to most other farm to school programs, but many tribes also wish to incorporate the cultural aspects of traditional food practices along with their languages. This added component requires an additional layer of planning and local capacity building. Just like other farm to school programs, Tribal programs are creating programs and activities that are intended to get more local foods into school systems and to increase students' knowledge of nutrition, agriculture and culinary arts through hands-on, experiential learning methods. However, they are also committed to bring in their traditional food practices. Activities include storytelling about their tribe's relationship with the earth, growing traditional crops from heirloom seeds, such as blue corn or squash; substituting traditional foods, such as buffalo, into modern recipes; using traditional processing methods, such as grinding corn; and using traditional recipes. Incorporating traditional approaches to farm to school make the program more relevant to the Tribal communities and thus have a greater impact on Tribal members. Tribal farm to school programs require thoughtful planning and, at times, entirely different approaches to other types of farm to school programming.

Summary of Benefits Reported by Tribal Farm-to-School Practitioners

- Positive economic impacts on the local economy.
- Healthier eating habits for youth, which improves the health of the community over the long term.
- Increases cultural knowledge by strengthening connections to traditional food.
- Reinforces the shared value of self-reliance by supporting local farmers.
- Highlights how traditional foods connect children to the land, their Tribal history and creation stories.

- Celebrates Indigenous knowledge and strengthens cultural, spiritual and social connections.
- Increases purchasing among traditional food growers, supports cultural values and sparks community economic development.
- Reduces the carbon footprint by shortening the food supply chain and transportation.

Creating Farm to School Relationships Between Nebraska Tribal Communities and the State of Nebraska

The Nebraska Legislature and University of Nebraska Extension can create a long lasting relationship with Nebraska Tribal farm to school programs by establishing the following items:

- A Land Acknowledgement Statement that educates the public on the traditional homelands of Tribal people in Nebraska.
- Webinars to learn about the traditional edible and medicinal plants of Tribal communities and food sustainability efforts that K-12 schools are doing in Tribal communities.
- Webinars for Nebraska Tribal communities on agronomy and horticultural practices that would assist them in their community greenhouses, gardens and farm to school efforts.
- The creation of a Nebraska Tribal Agriculture Office that would act as a liaison between the USDA, Nebraska Agricultural Programs, UNL and Nebraska Tribal Nations to partner on food sustainability projects that would benefit the people of Nebraska and Tribal communities as well.
- A fall harvest celebration (Pow Wow) at UNL in November that would recognize and honor both the non-Native and Native farmers each year. This would help repair and sustain relationships between the two communities.

POLICY

LR 337 Task Force Findings and Recommendations

Creating an economically vibrant and educationally rich farm to school program all across Nebraska engages every sector of society. By its very nature, farm to school is a community-wide enterprise that involves more than local food producers and school cafeteria managers, teachers and administrators. School boards, businesses, commodity organizations, education groups, the Nebraska Departments of Education and Agriculture, the Legislature, the State Board of Education, and everyone from parents and private citizens to our federal government have an integral role to play. Just as everyone has a stake in the health and well-being of our communities, everyone has a role in helping farm to school reach its economic and educational potential.

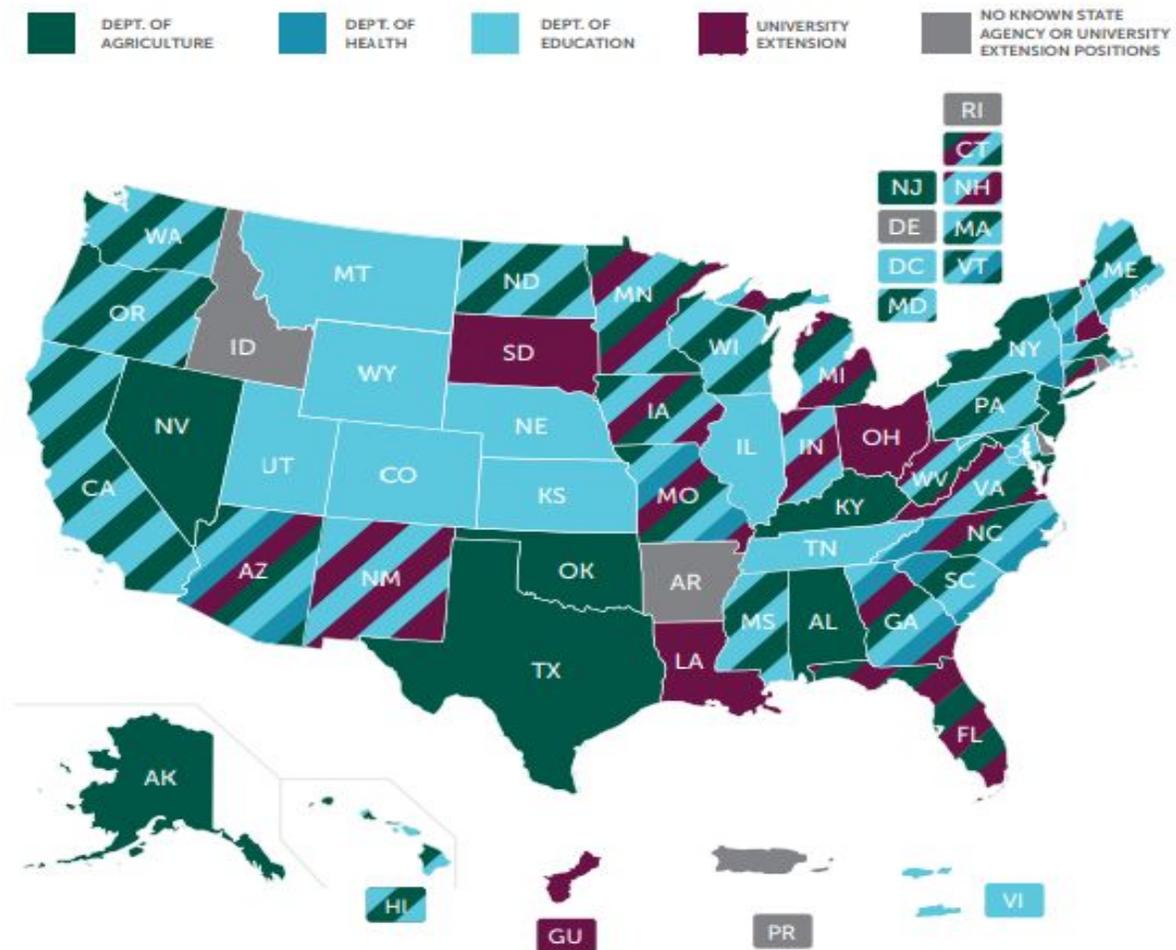
The section below identifies policy recommendations and actions—arranged by jurisdiction—that will enhance the impact of the farm to school program statewide. Some can be undertaken immediately, while others will require a longer period of time to implement. Every

recommendation aids our ability to build stronger and more prosperous communities by utilizing the engine of farm to school.

Nebraska Legislature

As an economic and educational program, farm to school is larger than any one arm of government. The Nebraska Legislature, however, is uniquely poised to play a leading role in promoting the program’s development through two initial actions that will propel farm to school to a new level of activity and outreach.

Map of State Farm to School Positions

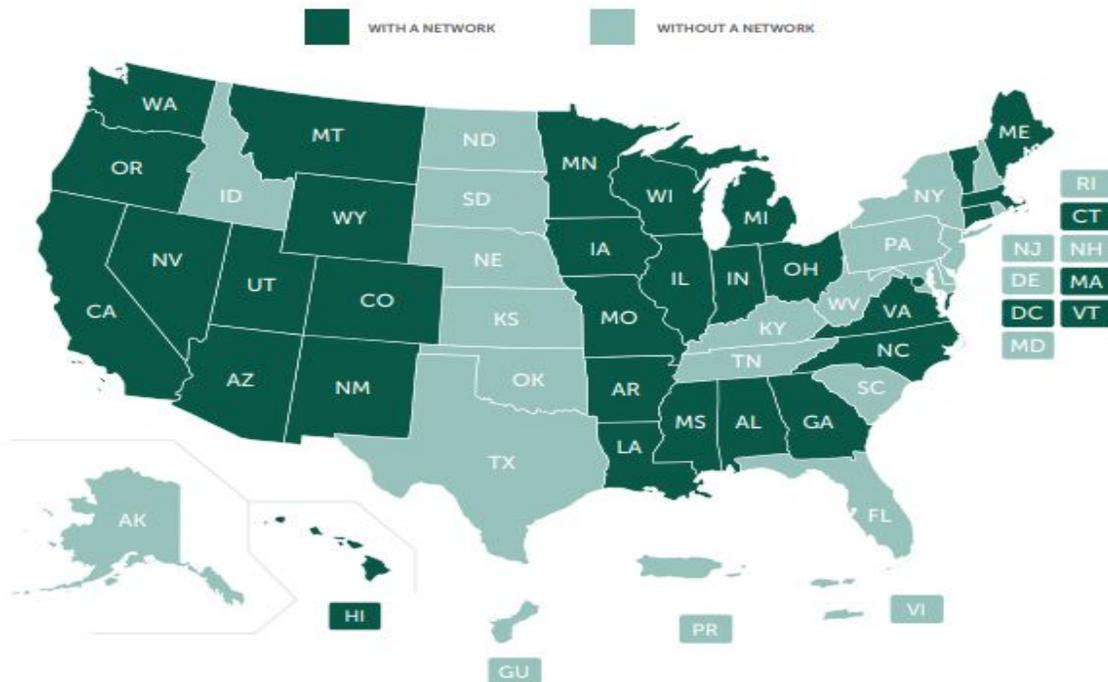


1) **Creation and funding of two full-time positions responsible for coordinating and supporting farm to school activities across the state, and strengthening relationships between Nebraska’s school systems, agricultural producers, and communities for enhanced farm to school programming.** These positions will implement and enhance farm to

school child nutrition programming in early childcare settings and k-12 school systems, and strengthen feasibility of school garden programs; develop and apply outreach strategies for local food use and promotion in schools; assess needs across broad stakeholder groups and conduct trainings, workshops and technical assistance, and evaluate processes and outcomes. These positions will also coordinate and convene a Nebraska network for farm to school, and convene and participate in other advisory councils as needed, serving as a liaison to internal and external partners.

2) Establishment of a statewide Farm to School Network. This group recommends that a statewide Farm to School Network be established by the Legislature—administered by the Nebraska Department of Education positions created in the previous (1) recommendation—to provide further collaboration between individuals and organizations in order to expand and institutionalize farm to school in Nebraska. This Network will increase awareness and interest in farm to school across stakeholder groups, and facilitate discussion on topics related to local foods including agriculture and nutrition education, and expansion of local foods in school nutrition programs. The Nebraska Farm to School Network will collect metrics that reference farm to school activity in the state, and evaluate the impact of various farm to school efforts.

Map of State Farm to School Networks



Nebraska Department of Education

Since the release of the LR 42 Task Force report in 2009, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) has provided the primary leadership on farm to school activities in the state. NDE is, accordingly, best equipped to administer an ongoing State Farm to School Network charged with building a more robust, comprehensive farm to school education program statewide.

1) Ensure that all Nebraska students learn about food, farming and agriculture. It is the conclusion of the LR 337 Task Force that educating the next generations of Nebraskans should include a focus on food, farming, and agriculture. While several high-quality programs do exist, and reach many students in our state, most students in Nebraska public schools do not graduate with a firm understanding of how food gets from farm to fork nor what future career opportunities exist for them after graduation. Agriculture and farming have evolved rapidly, and careers in farming are different than they were even 25 years ago. There are burgeoning opportunities in urban food production, greenhouse and other controlled environment production, and many other new and novel farm related industries. Requiring a certain level of understanding of the agriculture industry, from small-scale urban food production to the larger-scale commodity systems through in-class offerings is a first step to improving farm to school education in Nebraska.

2) Provide opportunities for all Nebraska students to engage in hands-on learning related to agriculture. The task force also recognizes the need for farm to school learning opportunities outside of the classroom. Whether it be in a school garden or greenhouse, field trips to local farms, or many other approaches, providing all Nebraska students with the opportunity to engage hands-on with growing food and connecting with Nebraska's agriculture industry is critical to building farm to school in our state. Doing so reinforces classroom learning and sparks curiosity for young students who otherwise might not be exposed to farming. Particularly for students in Nebraska's urban school districts and from backgrounds not typically connected to agriculture, exposure to farming is essential to this effort.

3) Connect school learning with opportunities to benefit families. The task force further notes that what happens at school is not isolated from the home environment and vice versa. By instructing students on farming at school, they bring that knowledge home and it spreads to siblings and other family members. Additionally, given the misalignment between the school calendar and growing season in Nebraska, providing resources and opportunities for students and their families to garden at home is seen as a big need to expand the impact of farm to school education. Utilizing partnerships with the University of Nebraska, community colleges, non-profits, and other agencies, extending farm to school resources can be accomplished.

4) Provide professional development opportunities for Nebraska educators. Lastly, the task force recognizes that in order for any of these education efforts to remain successful the educators themselves need to feel confident in their ability to teach about farming and agriculture. Educators come from various backgrounds, but most do not have farming or gardening experience. Equipping teachers and educators with a strong understanding of agriculture and basic food production is essential to carry this work forward.

Nebraska Department of Agriculture

With its mission of encouraging and promoting “the interests of agriculture through advocacy and education”, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) is a key partner in developing a statewide farm to school program. For over a century, the Department of Ag has been the face of agriculture in state government, and its reputation and public relations network offer a valuable platform for farm to school to be able to reach into every county in the state. Together, the state departments of agriculture and education constitute the institutional pillars that can make farm to school a major economic development engine for Nebraskans of all ages. This task force recommends agency cross collaboration on all farm to school efforts, including producer trainings, agricultural education in Nebraska schools, producer database resources, and farm to school outreach and promotion. Additionally, NDA should leverage current trainings, workshops or conferences to tie-in farm to school components and expand farm to school opportunities for producers and communities.

University of Nebraska Extension

Utilize University of Nebraska Extension database software MarketMaker to facilitate transparent communication across the food chain, from farm to school cafeteria. Nebraska MarketMaker is the largest and most in-depth database of its kind featuring a diverse community of food-related businesses. MarketMaker provides simple yet powerful search tools to connect with others across the production and distribution chain. School food service programs can use MarketMaker to communicate what product needs they have, including quantities and varieties of menu items, as well as requirements for liability insurance, delivery locations and grower certifications. Producers can find schools in their area looking for local products, connect with school buyers and build strong, lasting business relationships all through Nebraska MarketMaker.

State Commodity Boards and Agricultural Advocacy Groups

Commodity boards like the Corn, Wheat, Soybean, Beef and Dry Bean, and non-governmental advocacy groups like the Cattlemen, Farm Bureau, Farmers Union and the Center for Rural Affairs also have a vital role in creating a robust farm to school network in Nebraska. All of these organizations are established, well-recognized voices for the state’s agricultural economy and have an interest in anything that promotes agriculture. They may also be potential sources of sponsorship and charitable assistance to help make ‘farm to school’ a household term in the state and publicize its message. It will be essential to involve them in this outreach campaign.

School Administrations and District School Boards

Under the governance provision of ‘local control’, district school boards and school administrators exert a substantial degree of authority over educational operations within their jurisdiction. Whether a school district or a particular school actively embraces farm to school practices may be contingent on the knowledge base and inclinations of these administrative ‘gatekeepers’. Citizen involvement—be it by parents, teachers, staff, producers, businesses,

community leaders or even children—can be instrumental in gaining a local school system’s active participation in farm to school programming. School officials may not be familiar with the economic and educational benefits of farm to school and would profit from hearing from constituents. They may want to see evidence of public interest and support before transitioning the district towards local food and prioritizing food and agriculture in the curriculum.

For instance, local farmers and market gardeners—as landowners whose property taxes make up a significant share of the school district’s budget—have a direct stake in being able to sell into an institutional market like the school cafeteria program. That message needs to be communicated to their local school board. Likewise, community members who think it’s important for children to learn about gardening and healthy eating need to share that message with their school officials. This type of direct public engagement initiates a community conversation that, once begun, must remain ongoing. Our democratic system of governance depends on this active exchange of information between the officeholders and the public they serve.

Our local school districts are not just educating the ‘eaters’ of tomorrow; they are also educating our future farmers and gardeners, our food workers and makers of home-cooked meals. Ensuring that every community is grooming a new generation of ‘food-smart’ and ‘garden-ready’ citizens is one of the central tasks of our local school systems. Knowledge about our local food system needs to be learned not just at home, but in the school cafeteria, the classroom and the school garden. This learning is an essential part of the school day that must be taught if our young people are to be prepared to not only make dinner, but to pursue careers in agriculture. A safe and reliable local food system is the foundation of our communities, and our schools are the cornerstone.

Individual Farmers, Market Gardeners and Private Citizens

Critical as it is to pass bills, adopt policies, conduct outreach campaigns and forge connections, everything starts with the individual citizen. The old saw about it how it all starts with ‘one’ was never truer. Farm to school is going to become the engine of economic prosperity and educational enrichment through a multitude of individual efforts. Some farmer or market gardener has to go speak to a school board member or principal about the value of farm to school. A private citizen has to meet with a legislator about the importance of a bill that eases the process of sourcing food from local producers to keep our schools and local economies strong. A parent or neighbor has to volunteer to help the local school maintain its school garden so this vital learning tool can continue to instruct children about how their food is grown. An education official has to undertake the task of figuring out how to insert agriculture and food-growing instruction back into the curriculum. And a beef producer has to take the time to testify at a public hearing on why it’s vital for our schools to support the farmers and ranchers who pay a huge share of the property taxes that support our schools. Every individual has a part to play to make farm to school a successful blueprint for our state’s future.

Development of a 'pilot project' for federal incentives for farm to school procurement. An individual school's transition to procuring food locally can entail some adjustments in its operations. Sourcing foods that are seasonally available, reviving 'scratch cooking' in school cafeterias, potentially paying a bit more for food provided by property tax-paying local farmers and market gardeners (rather than from a national or even global distribution network) may create some additional costs. To address these concerns, a number of states (Michigan being the first) have enacted a state incentive program, where schools are compensated on a per-meal basis for sourcing from local producers. Recognizing that many states may not have the financial wherewithal to assume this additional expense, Congress is exploring the concept of a federal incentive to encourage local procurement. Legislation has already been crafted that would establish a 'pilot project' through the USDA that would provide financial incentives on a per-meal basis to targeted schools that purchase from local producers. This pilot project, piggybacking on the USDA's already existing list of food support programs for education, could lay the foundation for a 'long-term' policy of federal incentives to spur farm to school expansion nationwide. Enlisting the support of Nebraska's federal delegation could be instrumental in getting this incentive program adopted so that schools and communities all across the U.S. could better benefit from farm to school.

Appendix

USDA School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study Volume 3 for School Meal Costs and Revenues,
<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS-Volume3.pdf>

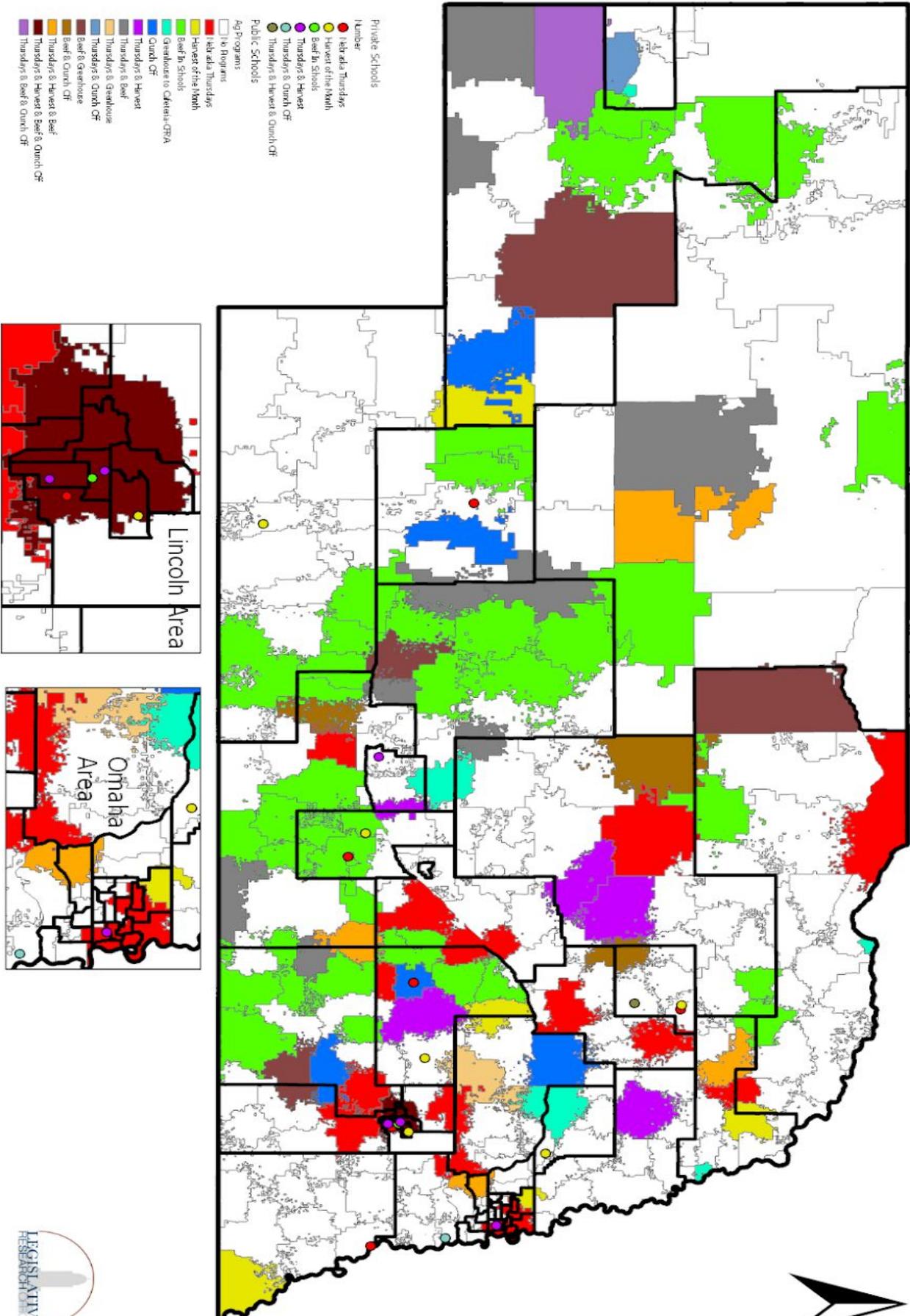
Acronyms

AFNR	Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources
AITC	Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom
CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
CNP	Child Nutrition Programs
CNR	Child Nutrition Reauthorization
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
CTE	Career and Technical Education
FFA	Future Farmers of America
FFVP	Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
HHFKA	Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010
IFB	Invitation For Bids
MERC	Methodology and Evaluation Research Core
NDA	Nebraska Department of Agriculture
NDE	Nebraska Department of Education
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
OCFS	Office of Community Food Systems
RFP	Requests For Proposals
SAE	Supervised Agricultural Experience
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SMP	Special Milk Program
SFSP	Summer Food Service Program
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

Tribal Nations in Nebraska

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Phone: (402) 878-2272, Ext. 3204
- Usni Ponca Nation (Ponca Tribe) –
Ponca Restoration Act
Chairman Larry Wright Jr.
Phone: (402) 857-3391
[Poncatribene.org](https://www.Poncatribene.org)

Farm to School Activities in Nebraska



Addendum to the Report

Further Reading and Letters of Support

NEBRASKA

2018 SCHOOL GARDEN NEEDS ASSESSMENT



School gardens are a tool for teaching interdisciplinary lessons and provide hands-on and experiential activities for students. Time spent in school gardens allow for observation, discovery, experiments, and lifelong lessons in growing food and nutrition understanding.

In 2018, Nebraska school personnel received a web survey about school gardens and growing spaces, with the intent to guide curriculum and provide support. Almost three-quarters of the 361 respondents were administrators (73%) and 16% were teachers. Agricultural educators represented 22%, and 85% were from rural locations. Altogether, respondents represented 165,800 students from pre-kindergarten to high school seniors.



39% have never had a garden or growing space

Private schools were more likely than public to never have had a garden (62% v. 35%)

The most common reasons why were:

- 48%** Lack of ability to care for garden during summer months
- 47%** Lack of financial support
- 42%** Not enough interest

Summer neglect and financial support were bigger barriers for schools with more low-income students.

A third of sites were extremely or very (most) interested in gaining access to a school growing space.



■ Most ■ Somewhat ■ Least

9% used to have a garden

The most common reasons why they no longer had a garden:

- 41%** Loss of garden leader
- 41%** Loss of volunteers
- 38%** Loss of interest

- 26% were extremely or very interested in gaining access to a school growing space
- 38% were somewhat interested
- 36% were slightly or not at all interested in regaining a garden or growing space.

52% had a garden when surveyed

Among schools who had ever had gardens, rural schools were more likely than urban to have a garden (88% v. 66%), as were public more than private (85% v. 76%)

14% of sites said they were a Farm to School program.

67% of schools received funding to start their gardens. Public schools were more likely to get start-up funds. About a quarter (23%) shared amounts of support, ranging from \$100-\$160,000, with an average of **\$20,266**

\$3,569 was the average annual garden budget among the 52% who shared that information.

WHAT AND WHO IS IN THE GARDEN?

Most gardens were started by classroom teachers and/or students (71% each). They were also most likely to manage it over the summer (52%/57%) and during the school year (68%/75%).

School gardens were variable in age:

- 20% were <1 year old
- 30% were 1-3 years old
- 21% were 4-6 years old
- 9% were 7-9 years old
- 20% were 10+ years old



62%

had a greenhouse, mostly in rural or public schools

About a quarter of sites planted in the ground (26%), or in raised beds (24%). 18% planted in containers or garden towers. Urban and private sites were 2x as likely as rural and public to plant in the ground, and more than 3x as likely to use raised beds.

Most common garden features were:

- 33% -- tool shed or storage area
- 31% -- automatic irrigation
- 26% -- outdoor teaching area
- 21% -- sinks
- 19% -- a compost area

WHO IS IN THE GARDEN?

27%

of sites reported 10% of their students had garden instruction

19%

of sites reported >50% had garden instruction



Older students were more likely to learn in the garden

- Pre-K: 12%
- Kindergarten: 29%
- First: 27%
- Second: 27%
- Third: 29%
- Fourth: 31%
- Fifth: 32%
- Sixth: 25%
- Seventh: 43%
- Eighth: 50%
- Ninth: 70%
- Tenth: 75%
- Eleventh: 73%
- Twelfth: 72%

97%

of schools used their growing space to support student learning

Most instructors created their own materials:

- 82% used self-created lesson plans
- 46% used websites
- 38% used resources from workshops or seminars
- 33% used textbooks
- 22% used garden-based curriculum
- 14% used nature-based curriculum
- 7% used trade books (literature)

99%

used the garden to teach **SCIENCE**

- 40% used the garden to teach **MATH**
- 8% to teach **HISTORY/SOCIAL SCIENCES**
- 8% to teach **ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTS**

Non-core courses most often taught in the garden:

- 83% Agricultural studies
- 35% Health/nutrition
- 25% Service learning/community service
- 23% Family and Consumer Sciences/Culinary Arts
- 21% Environmental studies
- 16% Business/entrepreneurship



91%

used the garden during class instruction time

To support student learning, sites used the garden:

- 48% after school
- 27% in a summer program
- 14% before school
- 12% for non-school community uses
- 7% during recess

Schools with more low-income students were more likely to use the garden during class time than those with higher income levels.

INSTRUCTORS & GARDEN OUTPUT

84% of garden instructors were school teachers

Other instructors included:

- 31%** Paid school staff
 - 14%** Community volunteers (not parents)
 - 12%** Older students (buddy teaching)
 - 10%** Parent volunteers
- 13%** of sites had garden support staff.

Most common **positive** observations of **students**:

- 47%** Increased leadership skills
- 45%** Increased environmental attitudes
- 43%** Sense of volunteerism

Most important **benefits** of school gardens:

- 38%** Increasing awareness of careers
- 36%** Increasing environmental attitudes
- 35%** Improving decision-making skills

“Improved call to be stewards of creation.”

Most important potential **challenges** of gardens:

- 42%** Supporting student learning and engagement
- 34%** Managing an aesthetically pleasing space
- 32%** Maintaining good relationship w/groundskeeper

Difficulty with school gardens:

“Amount of time to make this productive has frustrated some teachers. Don't like the time we spend on it with little results.”

Most important factors in supporting school gardens:

- 37%** Encouragement from administration to use garden as an instructional tool
- 37%** Teacher training in garden-based instruction
- 34%** Teacher training in gardening skills



84% grew vegetables

Besides vegetables, gardens grew:

- 58%** ornamentals (non-edible plants)
- 51%** herbs
- 27%** Nebraska native plants
- 16%** fruits
- 1%** nuts

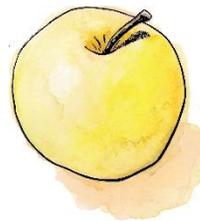


47% used their produce in the school lunch

Other uses of harvested produce:

- 38%** donated
- 37%** sold
- 35%** eaten in class/cafeteria testing
- 35%** eaten during garden time
- 34%** academic study
- 12%** composted
- 4%** eaten out-of-school (like at PTO or school board meetings)

Agricultural educators were more likely to say their garden supplied their cafeteria, but were less likely to say their produce was donated. Schools with more low-income students were more likely to eat during garden time.



There was a strong desire from respondents to have more garden related training.

81% wanted more garden-based learning instructions.

Nearly half (48%) wanted to professional development opportunities for gardening skills, and/or outdoor classroom management.

SCHOOL DIFFERENCES LEAD TO DIFFERENT GARDEN EXPERIENCES



Urban

Urban		Rural
66%	Had a garden	88%
7%	Had a greenhouse	69%
50%	Had a man-made wildlife habitat	13%
57%	Had an outdoor teaching area	28%
29%	Had a pond or water feature	9%
29%	Had a rain barrel	8%
43%	Grew Nebraska native plants	14%
0%	Had sinks	24%
22%	Used garden during recess	5%
40-50%	Students getting garden instruction	30%
62%	K-5th students in garden	25%
22%	8th-12th students in garden	74%
29%	History/social studies	5%
44%	Agricultural studies	87%
44%	Art	7%
44%	Environmental studies	19%
63%	Health/nutrition	32%
65%	Harvested & eaten in garden time	32%
29%	Composted	9%
18%	Used in school lunch	51%
12%	Sold	40%
21%	Funded by school/district	69%
16%	Funded by PTA/PTO funds	1%
29%	Partnership w/college or university	9%

Location and school type were related to many garden access and learning differences. The tables at left show statistically different characteristics – that is, the differences between the two are large enough that it is unlikely to be due to chance. There are some similar patterns between urban and private schools, but the overlap between the two is limited - only 5% of schools were both urban and private.



Both gardens and greenhouses were more prevalent in rural and public schools. The features of the gardens varied by location – while rural school gardens had sinks, urban schools were twice as likely to have several decorative features. Rural schools were 3x more likely than urban schools to have school or district funded gardens.

In rural and public schools, the gardens were generally not used during recess, and which grades had access to the gardens depended on location and type. Overall, about a quarter of elementary school students used the gardens, and three-quarters of high school students. But NOT in urban or private schools, where use is highest for younger students.



Private

Private		Public
76%	Had a garden	85%
10%	Had a greenhouse	66%
23%	Used garden during recess	6%
38%	PreK students in garden	10%
64%	1 st – 4 th students in garden	26%
54%	6 th students in garden	23%
31%	9 th students in garden	74%
23%	11 th – 12 th students in garden	77%
33%	History/social studies	5%
45%	Agricultural studies	86%
55%	Art	8%
17%	Funded by school/district	67%
50%	Funded by individual donations	15%



Of 5 types of classes, only agricultural studies were more common in rural and public school. Perhaps related to that, the sale of and use of garden produce in school lunches was higher in rural areas.



All differences significant at least the 0.05 level; FlatIcon images from Freepik



NEBRASKA

2017 EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SURVEY

Farm to School enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and education sites.



Farm to Preschool
NEBRASKA

Early childhood is an ideal time to teach and influence lifelong eating habits and taste preferences for our littlest eaters.

FARM TO PRESCHOOL

- Connects early childcare settings to local food producers in order to serve locally grown foods in snacks and meals
- Emphasizes experiential learning opportunities in nutrition and agriculture
- Educational experiences are enhanced through hands-on learning in school gardens
- Fosters parent and community engagement

CORE ELEMENTS OF FARM to SCHOOL



THE 2017 NEBRASKA FARM TO PRESCHOOL SURVEY

309 early childcare providers, representing more than 54,000 children across the state, responded to the survey. The greatest representation was in the urban areas of Omaha and Lincoln, representing more than half of respondents (51%). Nearly three-quarters (73%) of all respondents were licensed family daycare home programs, with the rest mostly centers, and a small number (2%) of school district respondents.

FARM TO SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Almost all sites reported doing at least one of three farm to school (F2S) activities.



94%

served local food products.



51%

tended edible gardens.



20%

conducted F2S education activities.

Sites more than 10 attendees were more likely to do education activities than smaller sites (38% vs. 7%). One out of three sites who had more part-time attendees did F2S education activities, but only 14% of sites with mostly full time (75%+) attendees did them.

35% of sites had done farm to school activities for at least 3 years.

The most common **existing** activities were:

42% Educating children about locally grown food, how food grows and where it comes from

39% Worked with children in an edible garden

Intent to start in the next year was highest for:

33% Celebrating National Farm to School Month

32% Educating children about locally grown food, how food grows and where it comes from

ACCESS TO LOCAL FOOD

22% of sites did NOT purchase local foods

- 34% of Centers did NOT purchase local compared to 18% of Family Day Care Homes
- 28% of urban sites did NOT purchase local compared to 16% rural locations
- 35% of those without gardens did NOT buy local compared to 9% of those with gardens



46% purchased local food from farmers' markets, with smaller sites more likely than larger sites to purchase there.

43% received donated produce. This was more common in larger sites, rural locations, and those with gardens.



34% grew produce in their own gardens,



Vegetables were the most purchased local food items (45%), then fruit (33%), and meat (12%). The most common single item **apples**. Over half of respondents said apples were in their top 5 items spent on local purchases. Also common were cucumbers (49%) and tomatoes (43%).

Meat was the most common desired local item that was hard to get due to cost or supply. This was followed by fruit (16%) and milk (12%).



SERVING LOCAL FOOD



54% served local vegetables at least weekly; Family Day Care Homes were more likely than Centers to serve local vegetables.

48% served local fruits on a weekly basis, with Family Day Care Homes serving local more often.



40% served local meat/poultry on a weekly basis. Family Day Care Homes, rural sites, and larger sites were more likely to serve local meats.

38% served local milk on a weekly basis, but nearly half (48%) said they never served local milk. Milk was the most common local food served daily.



EDUCATION

7% of sites used F2S curriculum – Centers were four times more likely to use curriculum than Family Day Care Homes.

67% want curriculum resources to integrate farm to school activities into their programs.

Sites with gardens most often used it for growing food, and use for taste testing and education was also high (58%) for this group. Centers (93%), larger sites (80%), those with older kids (70%), and in urban locations (68%) were more likely to use gardens for education.

RESOURCES

67% wanted grant/fundraising opportunities to help develop their program, with greater desire from Centers and larger sites.

42% wanted help connecting with local producers, especially larger sites.

33% were interested in electronic newsletters, with more desire from larger sites.



All differences significant at least the 0.05 level; Flaticon images from Freepik



REASONS FOR FARM TO SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

How important were various reasons F2S activities?

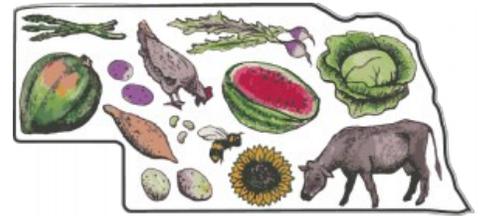
- 1 Improved health of children (89%)
- 2 Lower meal costs (83%)
- 3 Provide children with experiential learning (79%)
- 4 Teach children about where food comes from (78%)
- 5 Access to higher quality food (69%)



LINCOLN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

42,200 Students
62 Cafeterias
410 Nutrition Services Employees

Director of Nutrition Services: Edith Zumwalt, MS, RDN, SNS 402-436-1742



Farm to School
NEBRASKA

Local Purchases \$823,874*

*Year End Totals for SY19-20 (August 1, 2019 – July 31, 2020)

Dairy

= 4,179,668 HALF PINT
CARTONS (8 oz)
= 261,229 GALLONS

\$755,280

Chicken

= 136,528 PIECES FRESH CHICKEN
THIGHS

= 49,959 POUNDS **\$49,459**

Fresh Produce

= 16,477 POUNDS FRESH LOCAL PRODUCE
= \$14,668 FRESH MELON
= \$4,467 LOCAL APPLES,
CUCUMBERS, PEPPERS AND POTATOES

\$19,135



Nebraska Thursdays

Each Month LPS offers a "Nebraska Thursday" menu with items raised in or around Nebraska including fresh chicken thighs, watermelons, homemade cinnamon rolls and milk.

Apples
Cantaloupe
Chicken
Cucumbers
Green Peppers
Milk
Potatoes
Sour Cream
Watermelon
Yogurt

Local

Homemade Items

Lasagna	Mac 'n Cheese	Black Bean Rice Bowl	Chili
Meatloaf	Cinnamon Rolls	Submarine Sandwich	Tacos
Dinner Rolls	Creamed Turkey	Spaghetti & Meat Sauce	
Garlic Bread	Beef Enchilada	Philly Chicken Sandwich	
Sloppy Joes	Nebraska Bun		



Lincoln Public Schools
defines local as
produced within a

250 Mile Radius

of Lincoln, including neighboring Iowa,
Kansas and Missouri.

9/29/2020



NEBRASKA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

December 17, 2020

Sharon L. Davis, MS, RD
Administrator Nutrition Services
Nebraska Department of Education
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68509

Chair Halloran and Members of the Agriculture Committee

I appreciate the opportunity to provide information on farm to school activities in Nebraska. In my role as the Administrator of Nutrition Services I oversee the management of the Child Nutrition Programs. This includes the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Summer Food Service Program. While *farm to school* is commonly thought only to be for k-12 schools, the Department of Education has worked to expand the practice of utilizing local foods in all of the Child Nutrition Programs. In my previous role as Assistant Director of Nutrition Services, I prioritized supporting external partners work on local foods in schools and provided technical assistance and workshops on various aspects of bringing local foods to the plates of Nebraska's children. I am also a member of the current Farm to School Task Force.

Farm to school is not mandated nor heavily regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Schools, child care facilities, and summer feeding sites voluntary participate by bringing local, healthy foods to the plates of children they serve. The USDA does not provide additional funding or other financial support beyond the normal meal reimbursement received for each meal type served (free, reduced, paid). Farm to school implementation will look different depending on the interests of those championing the movement. Typically, there are three components: procurement, education, and school gardens. The USDA does not regulate the definition of local but allows flexibility based on availability of product and producers.

The USDA does offer limited grant opportunities that can provide financial support for farm to school activities. The Department of Education has applied and received grants, one in 2017 and the other in 2019. Funds from the 2017 grant were used to develop the Nebraska Thursdays program which promotes and supports schools in bringing local foods to students' plates on the first Thursday of each month. Schools that sign up to participate in Nebraska Thursdays receive exclusive access to promotional products, marketing materials, and a recipe portal. Nebraska Thursdays participation has grown from the original five pilot schools to almost 50 in school year 2020. The 2019 USDA Farm to School grant award has allowed the Department of Education to formally partner with Nebraska Extension to expand their farm to school reach. The funds will be used to offer a 2021 Nebraska Farm to School Institute for local level farm to school teams. Additional farm to school efforts were supported by the Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program funds. Through this grant, a Nebraska Harvest of the Month program was developed, featuring nine local specialty crop items for each month school is in session. Melons, leafy greens, sweet potatoes, turnips, potatoes, squash, asparagus,

cabbage, and dry beans were the featured products with apples and carrots added this school year. The Harvest of the Month toolkit features a taste testing guide, recipes, stickers, trivia sheets and beautiful posters of each featured product. The materials provide educational information regarding each product which helps to teach children about where their food comes from and nutritional information.

The Department of Education strives to provide leadership that inspires service of nutritious meals to children, students and adults, and create a healthy school food environment. Since 2017, the Department of Education has dedicated a .5 FTE to manage farm to school grant activities. The position is funded through State Administrative Expense funds provided to the department for the management of the Child Nutrition Programs. Having a dedicated staff member has helped to increase participation in farm to activities, expanded the grassroots Beef in Schools efforts and increased awareness of farm to school benefits. Farm to school activities can support the development of healthy eating habits and improve family food security across the state by boosting participation in school meals.

Sincerely,



Sharon L. Davis, MS, RD
Administrator Nutrition Services

12/15/2020

Chair Halloran and members of the Agriculture Committee,

My name is Lesa Gideon, RN. I am a member of the LR 337 Farm to School Task Force. I represent Burwell Public Schools (BPS) and Loup Basin Public Health Department (LBPHD) in roles as the School Nurse and a Public Health Nurse. Working in both roles, I observe and experience the full spectrum of the continuum of health from childhood to adulthood. I have a unique perspective of the significance and impact that a comprehensive farm to school program can have on the students and their futures, based on my nursing roles in two different entities.

As a Public Health Nurse at LBPHD, my work involves planning and implementing a worksite wellness program called Well @ Work. We perform onsite biometric screening events that bring education and referrals to employees at businesses and schools in Loup Basin's nine county jurisdiction. These screenings help identify and intervene to decrease the risks that high blood pressure, obesity and high blood sugars have on the development of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer in adults.

In contrast, in the school setting, my work involves being a part of a health and wellness team consisting of administration, staff and parents. The team evaluates student health in three key areas: nutrition, physical activity and social/emotional needs. In the fall of 2019, the nutrition team identified that less students were participating in the school lunch program, and a lack of knowledge of healthy food choices was leading to increased consumption of convenient highly processed, high fat and sugar foods. To address these issues, the team, along with the support of BPS Administration and School Board, began exploring the establishment of a full-scale farm to school program. Burwell Public Schools applied for, and was awarded funding for, a FY 20-21 USDA Farm to School Planning Grant. Currently, we are working on developing an action plan that will provide the framework for building a culture where locally sourced foods are served in the cafeteria, with farm to school curriculum and hands-on activities for students K-12. The plan will explore new relationships with local agricultural producers for food procurement, student garden and greenhouse opportunities, recipe development, and taste testing events for students. As a result of these actions, our goal is that students will gain valuable knowledge, habits and skills that will benefit them for a lifetime and will decrease their risks for developing heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

I appreciate the opportunity to be a member of the LR 337 Farm to School Task Force, having a voice in the effort to bring more farm to school capacity to Nebraska schools through Legislative support. I look forward to the possibility of a network of expertise and resources for our school as we build a comprehensive Farm to School Program.

Thank you for your consideration,



Lesa Gideon, RN

Public Health Nurse | Wellness Coordinator | School Nurse Burwell Public Schools
Loup Basin Public Health Department | 934 I Street | PO Box 995 | Burwell, Ne 68823
Office: 308.346.5795 | Cell: 308.214.0865 | Fax: 308.346.9106

www.lbphd.org lesa.gideon@burwellpublicschools.com lgideon@lbphd.org

www.lbphd.org



Wayne Community Schools “Learning for Life”

Wayne Jr/Sr High School
611 West Seventh Street
Wayne, NE 68787
Phone: 402-375-3150
Fax: 402-375-5251
www.wayneschools.org

Wayne Elementary School
312 Douglas Street
Wayne, NE 68787
Phone: 402-375-3854
Fax: 402-375-1702
www.wayneschools.org

Early Learning Center
Sunnyview Place Bus. Park
803 Providence Road
Wayne, NE 68787
Phone: 402-833-1450
www.wayneschools.org

Judy Poehlman
57447 860th Road
Wayne NE 68787
January 16, 2020

Chair Halloran and members of the Agriculture Committee

My name is Judy Poehlman and I have been in school food service for 37 years. I have also been active in the Nebraska School Nutrition Association, holding several offices. I was State President from 2012 to 2014. Currently I am the Legislative Chair. I am also on the farm to school task force.

I started farm to school with the Nebraska Department of Education as a pilot project. I had an open mind and I saw positive opportunities. In theory it sounded like a great thing to do, but what about the reality of it? Would it require a lot more of my time driving to pick items up that were currently being delivered to the school? Food safety with the fresh produce was a concern. Would costs be higher? We had purchased local melons, but I never promoted it. I believe I was quoted as saying I would never drive an hour to pick up local beef from the locker.

Fast forward a few years. The students and families like that now buy local or Nebraska products. It has become a selling point for some parents and students, and I enjoy the drive. The students have an interest in their food and ask if it is local watermelon and local beef. The producers have learned about the school meals program.

It has been an educational process for the kitchen and the farmers with the beef, but it has been great. They procure and get the beef to the locker, and I pick it up. Some of it is donated, but I want to purchase it if I can. I want this to be sustainable for the school and the farmer, not based on community donations. I buy the produce, and I want to buy the meat.

In the process, I have learned that many students come from no agricultural background and a garden in the backyard is not commonplace. Kids may not know what a tomato that makes salsa looks like. I look at farm to school as an opportunity to buy local which grows the local economy helping families who support our school. Buying local is an opportunity to get fresher produce as the season allows. Using greens grown in the FFA grow towers have allowed students to see their crops used in the lunchroom. It has also started the spark of agricultural careers in Nebraska.

As President of NSNA I had the opportunity to travel across the state and learn what other schools were doing. I saw many schools doing great things with farm to school. I also know there is a desire in the

state school programs to do more. Schools have limitations that people don't always see such as staff to prep the produce, storage and refrigeration room. Up until ten years ago that was a major barrier for our school. We did not have a walk-in cooler, just a 3-door refrigerator and 2-door refrigerator so careful planning and ordering had to get the job done. Now I have a 3-door just for melons when they are in season. We did not have room or electricity to have more refrigeration which are obstacles for schools around us. One of the schools that is starting beef to school had to wait until they could get a chest freezer for the beef this fall.

This school year we have purchased almost \$9000 of local beef, 245 watermelon, 180 cantaloupe, 76 tomatoes, cucumbers and green peppers. The reduction of self-serve fruit and vegetable bars has impacted the amounts that we used this year. I believe the numbers would have been higher had we not been impacted by COVID-19.

I think it is important to make this work for all schools. This year I have learned from other schools that are working to grow their farm to school program and sourcing Nebraska foods. Producers in those school communities wanting to help. Schools want to pay more but we all have to maintain that positive budget and operate in the black. I look forward to the future and what this means for the school meal programs in Wayne.

December 16, 2020

Agriculture Committee of the Nebraska Legislature
Nebraska State Capitol
Lincoln, NE 68509

Attn: Legislative Resolution 337
Re: Center for Rural Affairs Statement of Support

Dear Chairman Halloran and members of the Agriculture Committee,

The Center for Rural Affairs is a private non-profit organization, established in 1973 and based in Lyons, Nebraska. The Center works to promote social and economic justice, environmental stewardship and strengthen rural communities. The Center has consistently engaged in farm to school programs in Nebraska and managed three USDA farm to school grants since 2014. The organization has facilitated relationships between school nutrition programs and local producers and is currently working with FFA to assist schools in greenhouse education.

In recent years, farm to school activities have grown across the state, however, obstacles remain which hinder local procurement and educational opportunities for schools. The recommendations presented in this report would ease barriers to increase local foods in Nebraska school districts.

I. Increased Procurement of Local Foods in Schools

While notable Nebraska schools are successfully procuring local foods, the process is often burdensome for both schools and producers. Schools often require high volumes and consistent supplies of products to meet food service needs. These needs are unrealistic for small producers to meet as seasonality and variability in harvest make production unpredictable. The use of multiple producers may aid in this, but schools may not have access to multiple producers in their area. In addition, schools often lack the staff and facilities to prepare meals using the scratch cooking that is required with raw foods received directly from producers.

One solution, which many schools have utilized, is seeking local foods through distributors which regularly serve schools. Distribution companies can aggregate food and offer large quantities in a portioned and prepared form that is suitable for the cafeteria. However, local food can be difficult to preference through distributors and nutrition staff may have to go out of their way to seek it. This is burdensome when added to an already heavy workload. The establishment of a statewide farm to school network and creation of two positions to coordinate this program would bridge the gaps in this supply chain. A focused network could offer clear information to schools on local producers throughout the state as well as distributors offering local products. These positions would ease much of the burden put on both school districts and producers to ensure farm to school is a reality.

II. Increase in Resources for Food Production Education

Nebraska has an abundance of agriculture educators working to cultivate the next generation of farmers. However, many of these educators lack the preparation needed to offer food production education. The Center for Rural Affairs has worked extensively with greenhouse instructors throughout the state and found that each is motivated to present the most valuable information to their students. However, many lack a consistent curriculum on greenhouse or food production education. In addition, many are operating in facilities that are underfunded and in ill-repair.

The establishment of a statewide farm to school network and two farm to school positions brings further food production opportunities to classrooms. Farm to school employees can coordinate with established organizations, such as FFA and 4-H, to build a food production curriculum which can be offered throughout the state. A statewide network can assist educators seeking funding opportunities to expand their educational efforts.

III. Conclusion

Farm to school is a win for the state of Nebraska. Access to local foods brings healthier diets and a knowledge of food origins to youth. Food production education increases opportunities for students and adds beginning farmers to our state. In addition, local purchases diversify markets and increase the incomes of our states producers. Increasing the amount of resources available for farm to school adds to our health, education, and economy.

Respectfully submitted,



Justin Carter
Project Associate



12/16/2020

Agriculture Committee
Nebraska Unicameral

RE: LR337 - Interim study to reexamine which Nebraska-grown food products can feasibly be used for school meals and snacks

My name is Alex McKiernan and I am writing this evening in support of the work and recommendations of the Task Force that completed the Interim Study prompted by LR337 into so called "Farm to School."

My wife, Chloe Diegel, and I own and operate Robinette Farms in Lancaster County where we grow produce for retail and wholesale markets in Nebraska. Neither Chloe nor I grew up farming, and what we learned about agriculture was not in Nebraska schools. We hope this will change as we foster more communication between our state's #1 industry and what I believe is our #1 priority – educating tomorrow's leaders.

Agriculture touches on every aspect of education: science, business, history, math, literature and the arts, economics as well as important life lessons about nutrition and physical activity. Farm to School efforts can keep children focused on the skills they need for success while simultaneously creating an understand for, and appreciation of, Nebraska's diverse agricultural economy and heritage.

Bringing Nebraska foods into Nebraska schools will open our children's minds to the possibilities and opportunities right in their very own communities. These opportunities run the gamut from high-value, direct-to-market specialty crop production like ours, to the commodity production which dominates our state's economy. When schools become farm customers, local dollars stay local while we build strong relationships around food.

Food is central to family, community and indeed life itself. It should also be front and center in our schools.

Thank you for your time and I hope you can support the Task Force recommendations to expand Nebraska's Farm to School efforts.

Alex McKiernan
Robinette Farms



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THAYER CENTRAL COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

P.O. Box 9, Hebron, NE 68370

December 16, 2020

Dear Chair Halloran and Members of the Ag Committee,

It is an honor to share with you today my thoughts on Nebraska's farm to school program and to also ask for your consideration of LR 337's final report. Farm to school is an essential piece to the future of our great state! From our children's nutritional consumption, informing the next generation of where their food comes from, and also to the economic benefits to our local producers, the Farm to School movement is on track to reach new heights in the near future. LR 337 is a critical piece to elevate, expand and tie together so many positive pieces to help make this happen. If turned into legislation, this final report would have the ability to help our Farm to School system navigate through multiple challenges that we are currently facing and to position ourselves better for future hurdles.

My personal experiences with farm to schools is the Beef to Schools component. In 2015, cattle producers, business owners and community supporters came together to form the Titan Beef Boosters at Thayer Central Schools in Hebron. This group has provided local, fresh and highly nutritional beef to our school for six years. Our students get fed high quality beef twice a week and the satisfaction they receive has resulted in a significant increase in lunch participation. We educate children about where their food comes from - in the cafeteria, in the classroom and on the farm. This has been a very successful program and we have worked hard to share it across Nebraska. To date, there are now more than 80 schools across our state that have a beef program. It shows that we can all work together for our kids and our communities. Even with success, the Beef in Schools movement has many challenges. Legislation from LR 337 would help alleviate much of this and help continue to take Beef in Schools and Nebraska's Farm to School program to another level.

Thank you once again for your consideration of this resolution, time spent on this matter and your efforts for everything you do for our wonderful state.

Sincerely,

Rob Marsh
Chairman - Titan Beef, Nebraska Beef in Schools
Thayer Central Board of Education



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Agriculture Committee
Chairman Steve Halloran
Lincoln, NE 68509

December 17, 2020

RE: Support of LR337

Chairman Halloran and Members of the Agriculture Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer Nebraska Farmers Union's written support in support of Senator Brandt's LR337, and the resulting Task Force and its recommendations.

Nebraska Farmers Union is a long-time supporter of "farm to school" as well as "farm to public institutions" efforts. These efforts help source high quality local foods which are good for local food producers, good for the local economies, and good for the food eaters who get better food. For example, it makes no sense for Nebraska schools to purchase beef produced in Texas or Oklahoma to feed our Nebraska school children when Nebraska produces the best beef in the country.

The recent meltdown in our meat processing system as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a wake-up call for everyone involved in this system to look for new and better ways to diversify our food processing and procurement systems.

There is a great deal of long term value for our children to learn where their food comes from. Anytime we can shorten the distance between food producers and food consumers, both parties win. Nebraska has talked about the need to do something on this issue for a long time, but has failed to focus the logistics necessary in order to identify and eliminate the sticking points and open up the school food procurement system to more local and regionally produced foods of all kinds.

We support the findings of the Task Force and its recommendations, especially for the need for two full-time employees to coordinate a statewide farm to school network that puts producers and supplies in contact with schools.

In closing, the thrust of LR337 is a common sense self-help program that benefits Nebraska food producers and Nebraska food consumers. There is enormous growth in locally produced foods of all kinds. Our state has a corresponding enormous opportunity to improve our public food procurement system. Let's take advantage of this opportunity before us.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this letter of support.

John Hansen, President
Nebraska Farmers Union
1305 Plum Street

Fighting for Nebraska's family farmers and ranchers since 1913.